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Symbolic Franco:  
Spain's Dictator in the American Conservative Imagination, 1950-1980

By  
Sean Patrick Buchanan

Presented to the Graduate Faculty of  
Claremont Graduate University in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Arts in History & Archival Studies.

We certify that we have read this document  
and approve it as adequate in scope and  
quality for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## I. Introduction

In the postwar period in the United States, the primary focus of conservative political ideology shifted from isolationism and New Deal opposition to strict anti-communism. The conservatism of the 1920s through the 1940s, under the leadership of Robert Taft, would give way to a more modern conservatism influenced by a variety of intellectuals, some Catholic, some anticommunist, some libertarian. In an effort to demonstrate fervent anti-communist sentiments, the new modern conservatives highlighted their support for anti-communist leaders and figures across the US and worldwide. One particular anti-communist leader that American conservatives supported was the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco. Though tainted by affiliations with Axis powers and an oppressive dictatorship, conservatives' admiration for Franco's anti-communism lead them to ignore or forgive his more notorious traits.

The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), though it was an especially Spanish conflict with Spanish roots and causes, was initially viewed through the lens of the opposing ideologies of the mid-twentieth century, fascism and communism. There are several reasons for this focus on the ideological nature of the war, among which are the immediate onset of World War II, the closing of Spanish archives and censorship of the press in the Franco regime, and eventually the Cold War. Because of the Franco regime's tight grip on archival records concerning the civil war, much of the early historiography was written by Anglo-American historians. As a result, the Spanish Civil War was understood to be a premature conflict between fascism and communism and a precursor to World War II. In American political circles in particular, the ideological currents of communism and opposition to said communism influenced the understanding and interpretation of the civil war in Spain.

It is through this lens, of anti-communism and Cold War politics, that American conservatives viewed Francisco Franco. From 1950 to 1980, and especially in the 1960s, one of the most significant conservative journals, *National Review*, espoused support for Franco in a myriad of ways that effectively displayed the central themes of the new conservative movement. To conservatives, Franco was a symbolic figure. As a symbol of anti-communism for the conservative movement, *National Review* published a variety of articles that defended Franco from what they considered unfair and incorrect portrayals in the media and on the American left while emphasizing traits of his that they found laudable.

In this essay, I argue that the American conservative movement utilized Franco as a symbolic figure to underscore key themes that the conservative movement wished to instill into American politics. They highlighted Franco as a hero of Western Civilization, a religiously significant figure, and an anti-communist bulwark. In doing so, they sought to distinguish themselves from the American left, whom they believed held significant influence in American media and academia. To show this, I will examine a variety of articles published by *National Review* (hereafter *NR*) under the influence of founding editor William F. Buckley Jr. that describe Franco and the Spanish Civil War. Significantly, the effort to portray Franco in this manner in *NR* imported Francoist propaganda and historiography of the Spanish Civil War and revealed the extent to which American conservatives interpreted the Spanish Civil War in much the same way as Franco: as a religious crusade. Indeed, *National Review* imported these ideas into the American conservative imagination and the public more broadly as a byproduct of their symbolic depiction of Franco.

First, *NR* depicted Franco as a religious figure and a national hero of Spain. They highlighted the traditional Spanish values that Franco “defended” during the war and restored

afterwards. Here *NR* uses the term “Western Civilization” frequently. As an extension of this idea about Western Civilization, *NR* writers made the case that Franco’s Spain was a necessary ally of the West. Here, symbolic depictions often juxtaposed Spain with other nations that the US supplied with aid. *NR* concerns on this front were primarily economic, but still employed symbolic language to describe Franco’s Spain as a member of the West and an ideological bulwark against the economic principles of Communism. In their portrayal of Franco as a religious hero, they argued that Spain, as a bulwark against atheistic communism, was a vital ally of Christendom. Next, articles on the Spanish Civil War engaged in reproducing Francoist crusade historiography and religious myths. Though their interpretation was certainly a product of Cold War anxieties about communism, it ran parallel to the crusade historiography coming out of the Franco regime. Finally, among the variety of articles published that commented on the Spanish Civil War, *NR*’s most controversial piece came in 1973 and focused on the destruction of Guernica. Framed as a retort to perceived communist propaganda, it commented on the historical debate surrounding the bombing of the Basque town. This article, though it claimed to offer historical analysis, was designed to fight ideological battles in America regarding the influence of communism on history and politics. *NR* used the idea of Guernica to reinforce their anti-communism, but instead perpetuated Francoist propaganda.

At this moment, it is important to define a key term that will be significant for this paper. I will explain how conservatives defined the idea of Western Civilization in more detail in sections IV and V, but an important term to understand outright is crusade historiography. The historiography of the Spanish Civil War is fraught with vitriolic debates and high-profile fights between historians of varying political and academic backgrounds. Especially because of the closing of archives and censorship of dissenting opinions in Spain after the conclusion of the



war, much of the initial scholarship on the war was produced by Anglo-American scholars. Against this historiography coming out of England and the US, the Franco dictatorship imposed a propagandistic interpretation of the war as a religious crusade against a godless proletariat. Historians, such as Paul Preston, refer to this as crusade historiography.<sup>1</sup> Especially during the Cold War, many historians surveyed the war in Spain through a Cold War lens, identifying communism in the Spanish Republic as a key motivator for the Nationalist uprising. The idea that the Nationalists in Spain were on a religious crusade to rescue Spain from the onslaught on international communism justified Franco's cause in American conservative eyes and, as such, wrote about the Spanish Civil War in *NR* using religious language. This is uncovered in greater detail in section VI.

As this paper focuses on American political perceptions of Franco and the Spanish Civil War, I will begin by briefly assessing the historiography of the Spanish Civil War and the historical fights that have periodically flared over the past few decades. The heavy political influence on the historiography has shaped much of the contentious debates that have appeared. This will be important when discussing *NR* and the article "The Great Guernica Fraud" published in 1973, which is featured in section VII. Any brief assessment will have shortcomings by nature, and this is especially true when discussing the Spanish Civil War. Still, it is important to understand the context of the debates within the historiography, as *NR* joined these debates and indeed made some of these debates more public through their circulation.

American perceptions of Spain, and how they have shifted over time, will also be important to understand as well. This will lead to an understanding of how American conservatives' views of Spain during the Cold War developed outside the confines of anti-

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Preston, "War of Words: the Spanish Civil War and the Historians," in *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939* (New York, Routledge, 1993), 2.

communist ideology. Here, I lean heavily on the recent work of historian Richard L. Kagan. Kagan's work serves as a helpful preface to understanding American interpretations of Spanish culture and identity that motivated American elites, such as William F. Buckley Sr. I will note Buckley Sr.'s support for Franco during the Spanish Civil War within the context of other examples of American ideological support for Franco and imagined perceptions of Spain. A brief biography of Buckley Sr. will elucidate the nature of his understanding of Spanish culture and identity, as it pertained to the Spanish Civil War, and shed light on Buckley Jr.'s childhood, education, and Catholic upbringing. I will then discuss Buckley Jr.'s *God and Man at Yale* and the events which lead up to the founding of the *National Review* in 1955 to analyze how his upbringing informed his perspective on US politics and culture as well as Spanish history, culture, and identity. *God and Man at Yale* was Buckley's first point of contact with a wider audience and represented one of many first steps for the conservative movement. I will then pivot to how Americans viewed the Spanish Civil War from 1936 – 1939 and the religious influence that characterized the support for Franco among American Catholics. Here, I will highlight the significance of Buckley Jr.'s father, William F. Buckley Sr., as it relates to his views of communism and the West and how these were passed on to his son.

Buckley Jr., founder of *NR* in 1955, was one of a few central figures who significantly influenced the conservative movement. His brand of modern conservatism was an effective and coherent political ideology that achieved what the previous iteration of conservatism could not; the unification and fusion of several different groups on the right. While there were still significant disagreements between modern conservatives on a number of issues, they were unified by their opposition to communism. The new anti-communist conservative movement became more influential in American politics and many of the new ideas and policy proposals

appearing on the right would foster legitimate debate in the public arena. In their effort to synthesize conservatism and oppose communism, modern conservatives looked to the editorial magazine *National Review* where conservative, Catholic, and public intellectuals would espouse the new views and ideas of the right. While Buckley is a central figure to this analysis, a cast of characters vital to conservatism and *NR* will inevitably appear, so several important contributors must be given attention..

While the revival of US conservatism in this period cannot be directly linked to the Spanish dictator or his politics, the frequency with which *NR* wrote about Franco and Spain should not be ignored. Rather, examining the extent to which Franco's Spain operated in the political imagination of US conservatives will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of the conservative movement of the postwar period in the United States. They did not identify Franco as a fascist. They instead defined him as a moral arbiter of Spain's true history, culture, and identity. This identification, and the symbolic manner of their portrayal, reflected the important shifts in conservatism that took place during the Cold War.

Buckley's willingness to cement himself and *NR* firmly against any positions held by individuals he identified as political opponents was just one aspect of his popularity among conservatives. Support for Franco has taken a relative backseat in the historiography, but it too was a contentious point of conflict between conservatives and liberals at this time that Buckley focused on. In regard to issues both domestic and foreign, *NR* would not shy away from arguing the contrarian's point with vigor and conviction. As historians of US politics of the Cold War period have a wide range of topics before them – McCarthyism, anti-communism, the numerous watershed moments of the sixties, to name a few examples – this significant history has been overlooked. Across the span of the history of the conservative movement – that would initially

appear with the candidacy of Barry Goldwater and formally crystallize with the election of Ronald Reagan to President of the United States – this interesting aspect of conservative views on Franco’s Spain has yet to receive significant attention.

The links between Franco and US conservatives in the Cold War period as demonstrated in the pages of *National Review* are crucial to understanding the trajectory of modern conservatism in the United States. As a representation of a successful religious and traditional leader who achieved victory over communism, Franco was co-opted as a symbol of conservative superiority. Buckley’s rebranded conservatism would highlight this model of Franco throughout the postwar and Cold War period and evolve from a heterogenous set of ideas about culture, economics, and politics to a homogenous and formidable ideological bulwark that would influence policy at the highest level of the US government. Various conservatives would have their own views of Franco and Spain, but anti-communism lead many on the right to return to the symbolic image of Franco illustrated in *NR*.

In regard to terminology, I use the term conservatism to describe the fusionist conservatism that incorporated varying factions on the American right that materialized in the 1950s with Buckley’s influence. Conservatism and conservative politics in the United States has seen numerous transformations and much of the historiography of Cold War conservatism describes this movement with “re-” terms and phrases such as rebranding, resurgence, rebirth and revival, among others. I will avoid using this language, as there are better terms to describe what occurred in this period. The conservative movement of this period was more of a fusion of the factions on the right. “Revival” or “reawakening” are not the best descriptions of what truly occurred. This does not mean that disagreements did not appear, for the conservative movement was an ever-evolving project. As for the treatment of religion below, I refer to the different

denominations of Christianity by name. Catholicism is the key aspect of Christianity under this present study, though evangelicals and other Protestants appear periodically.

As for the central character to this study, I will simply use Buckley when I refer to William F. Buckley Jr. When I discuss his father, I will use Buckley Sr. and Buckley Jr. to distinguish them. Buckley Jr.'s siblings will be identified at first by their full name, and thereafter by their first name to avoid any confusion between the multiple Buckley family members that will appear in the unfolding of this study. While Buckley Jr. is the key actor here, a number of different contributors to *National Review* merit investigation, and I will offer brief biographies for them when necessary.

## II. American Responses to the Spanish Civil War: Historiography and Politics

With political fights occurring in the historiography of the Spanish Civil War, it should come as no surprise that the conservative movement hastened to place themselves within this argumentative framework and bring several of these debates into the public sphere. While the writing on crusade historiography and religious mythmaking in *NR* was not as explicit, the *NR*'s decision to publish Hart's article on Guernica reveals the extent to which conservatives aligned their politics and view of history firmly in opposition to anything they viewed as tainted by communism. As there was no shortage of work that supported either side of the argument over Guernica or other disputes in Civil War historiography, it was relatively simple to select a work which supported the view you wished to assert and publish it. In 1973, Hart did just that with his article the "The Great Guernica Fraud." The contentious nature of the historiography of the war was influenced by Cold War anxieties, political partisanship, Francoist propaganda efforts, and an Anglo-American central focus. Conservatives participated in some of these debates and displayed how differently they viewed the regime than other Americans did.

As stated in the introduction, much of the early historiography of the Spanish Civil War was produced by Anglo-American historians. The closing of archives following the war's conclusion meant that access to valuable primary sources was nearly impossible. According to historian Paul Preston, "The obstruction of scholarship, like many other aspects of the regime's censorship machinery, was a continuation of the war by other means."<sup>2</sup> Francoist historians produced crusade historiography that painted the war as a struggle to save Spain from an internationally directed communist effort to mobilize the Spanish proletariat. Outside of Spain, the historiography took a much different form. While many writers and historians focused on the ideological confrontation between fascism and communism, Gerald Brennan's *The Spanish Labyrinth* pointed to historical developments over the past hundred years in Spain, noting that the early roots of the conflict, such as the agrarian question, were undoubtedly Spanish issues.<sup>3</sup> Published in 1943, Brennan's work appeared as an early shift in focus away from the notion that Spain was little more than a dress rehearsal for the Second World War.

Another English historian, Raymond Carr, also pointed to Spanish causes for the conflict and avoided the monocausal explanation of the war as a contest of ideologies. However, the widely popular work, Hugh Thomas' *The Spanish Civil War*, significantly shifted public attention away from Spanish questions to the importance of the international volunteers and in particular British volunteers. It is this work, a largely narrative style history, that Jeffrey Hart refers to when arguing against the "official" account of the destruction of Guernica in 1937.<sup>4</sup> Thomas' commercially successful work increased interest in the Spanish Civil War but

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Preston, "War of Words: the Spanish Civil War and the Historians," in *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939* (New York, Routledge, 1993), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Preston, *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War*, (London, Penguin Books, 1965), 419-422.

represented a watershed for the historiographical trend that emphasized international involvement and gave little attention to the developments in Spain dating back to 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Within the Franco regime, the crusade historiography which sought to elevate the moral significance of the Nationalist cause was produced by police officers, priests, soldiers, and government propagandists. Though the description of the conflict as a religious crusade was more strongly emphasized in the years immediately following the war's end, the perceived dangers of communism continued to be a central focal point from the 1950s moving into the 1960s. Of course, communism and more specifically the Soviet Union did play a unique role in the Spanish Civil War, but recent entries into the historiography have revealed much about Soviet involvement that was previously unknown or misunderstood.

In his memoir of the war, George Orwell noted how communist forces sought to hijack elements of the Republican forces and hierarchy to achieve their own goals that did not necessary align with the Second Republic. *Homage to Catalonia* continues to be a widely read and important work in revealing this aspect of Soviet and Communist influence, though it is not a work of history *per se*. While providing monetary and military support to the Republic, the Soviet Union took advantage of the situation in Spain. In *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War*, historians Ronald Radosh, Mary Habeck, and Grigory Sevostianov and others elucidate the degree to which the USSR shortchanged and extorted Spain's Second Republic. Indeed, historians estimate that through manipulation of exchange rates, the USSR was able to coax hundreds of millions of dollars from the Republic's purse.<sup>5</sup> This alone creates a much different picture of Soviet support for the Republican forces. The image of the USSR

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<sup>5</sup> Ronald Radosh, Mary R. Habeck, and Grigory Sevostianov, *Spain Betrayed: The Soviet Union in the Spanish Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), xvii.

standing with the Republic against the Nationalists, along with Germany and Italy, is certainly much more complicated than the first impression.

With evidence that the Soviet Union took advantage of the Spanish Civil War while also providing material and military advisors, the question of communist propaganda surrounding the conflict also becomes more complicated. Take, for example, the destruction of Guernica. This was perhaps the most notorious moment of the Spanish Civil War. The fights that would play out in the historiography were more or less consumed by diametrically opposing viewpoints that left little room for nuance. On one side, the destruction was an atrocity carried out against a non-military target by the Nazi Condor Legion at the behest of Franco's Nationalists. On the other, the destruction was a propaganda tool, a nefarious scheme carried out by the Comintern to purposely raze a Basque town and blame it on the Nationalist forces. What is certain, is that the destruction of Guernica was utilized as a propaganda tool by both sides to varying degrees.

While the Franco regime continued to offer its politicized view of the war, journalist turned historian Herbert Rutledge Southworth appeared as a stalwart challenger to the regime-imposed historiography. His book *The Myth of Franco's Crusade* challenged crusade historiography outright and translated versions of his work influenced Spain to attempt a modernization of their version of history.<sup>6</sup> In 1977, the book *Guernica! Guernica!: A Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda, and History* uncovered the nature of Francoist propaganda surrounding the bombing. His book would serve as an effective counterargument to claims mounted in books like Luis Bolin's *Spain: The Vital Years*, which Jeffrey Hart would utilize to assert in *NR* that the destruction of Guernica was a communist propaganda plot, not the result of German and Italian bombers. This will be discussed in greater detail in Section VII. With this in

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Preston, *We Saw Spain Die: Foreign Correspondents in the Spanish Civil War*, (London: Constable and Robinson, 2009), 418.



mind, the question of political partisanship during the Spanish Civil War itself within the context of 1930s America must now be entertained.

American public perception of the Spanish Civil War is an interesting yet somewhat overlooked subject of study. The Second World War began soon after the conclusion of hostilities in Spain and would prove to capture much of the attention of the United States politically, economically, and culturally. The historiography of American involvement in Spain, however, is mostly focused on one topic. The war in Spain provided an opportunity for American men to leave home and join the fight, and like many other volunteers from around the world, many Americans made the most of this opportunity. Among the International Brigaders, as the forces of international volunteers fighting for Spain's Second Republic came to be called, the American volunteers were formed into the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.

Though approximately 3,000 American volunteers went to fight in Spain in the late 1930s, the official position of the United States was one of neutrality. This did not stop the few thousand men who would travel to Spain. While the US remained officially neutral, public figures, writers, journalists and wartime correspondents would take positions on the war and offer commentary not just on the fighting, but on the ideological aspects of the conflict in Spain, especially that of Communism. Indeed, just as much of the historiography of the war produced by American and British scholars confirms, the American public viewed the Spanish Civil War primarily as a contest between Communism and Fascism, not as a uniquely Spanish conflict with Spanish roots.

There is a certain nuance to this point, as the imagined root of the Spanish conflict was different among those who went to fight and those who stayed in the US. For the Abraham Lincoln brigade, many men interpreted the war as an outright rebellion against a democratically

elected government.<sup>7</sup> For those at home in the US, the conflict was underpinned by leftist, communists fighting to preserve the Republic against the Fascist troops led by General Francisco Franco. It is this view, of the Republican forces in Spain as communist crusaders, that characterized much of the support for Franco and the Nationalist cause that appeared in the American public, especially among Catholics.

By the time the Spanish Civil War began in 1936, the US had endured several years of the Great Depression and the Communist Party saw a surge in membership. Historian Harvey Klehr examined this trend in his 1984 work *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade*. While situating themselves as distinctly to the left of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal policies, the US communist party had around 100,000 members and exerted influence in unions as well as state and local politics. Holding rallies throughout the US, the American public was well aware that there were self-identified Communists and sympathizers. Klehr highlights that “there were never more than 100,000 American Communists at any one time, yet labor unions, youth groups, peace organizations, civil rights bodies...faithfully followed the Party’s direction.”<sup>8</sup> Communism exerted more influence in American politics in the 1930s than perhaps any other decade. Indeed, many of the men who joined the Abraham Lincoln Brigade identified as communists themselves.

Therefore, most American support for Franco during the Spanish Civil War was first and foremost a statement of anti-communism. The debates that occurred in newspapers, periodicals, and even church lecterns, were engaged most frequently with the question of Communism versus

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<sup>7</sup> This idea is expressed as one of a few factors that encouraged Americans to fight in Spain in James Yates’ memoir *Mississippi to Madrid: Memoir of a Black American in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade* (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing), 1989. See also Adam Hochschild, *Spain in Our Hearts: Americans in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Harvey Klehr, *The Heyday of American Communism: The Depression Decade* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 373.

Fascism. However, the debate was not always this straightforward, as supporters of Franco did not identify as fascists, nor did they really identify or define Franco as fascist. Anti-communism was the largest concern and several prominent public figures made this quite clear.

Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, is one example of anti-communist support for Franco that occurred among the American elite. In his article “Pro-Franco Anti-communism: Ellery Sedgwick and the *Atlantic Monthly*,” historian Michael E. Chapman outlines the various elements of the American public who voiced their support for Franco. He identified that support for Franco appeared amongst a diverse crowd of American elites, creating a complex picture of Francoist support that is difficult to pin down, though one aspect they all shared was a “loathing of Soviet communism.” His central claim is that Sedgwick (and his friend W. Cameron Forbes) “were not interested in Franco per se, but promoted his cause because they sought to demonstrate the danger that international communism posed to American national identity during a period of unprecedented insecurity.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, American support for Franco was less an appeal to Franco’s values and an identification with Spanish culture and identity, and more of an affirmation that international communism was a sincere threat to American national identity.

Though, Chapman makes clear that support for Franco was more complex than scholars have previously admitted. For example, Chapman notes that the broad scope of articles in the *Atlantic* do not point to a single, particular agenda. From 1936-1939, the *Atlantic* published approximately 717 essays and poems from 421 contributors.<sup>10</sup> While noting that the majority of the articles convey a right-of-center message, none explicitly portrayed a political stance on

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<sup>9</sup> Michael E. Chapman, “Pro-Franco Anti-communism: Ellery Sedgwick and the *Atlantic Monthly*,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 4 (2006): 641-643.

<sup>10</sup> Chapman, “Pro-Franco Anti-communism,” 651.

Spain until 1938. Even when these political pieces on Spain appeared in March of that year, Sedgwick employed what Chapman would term a “let-the-reader-decide-tactic.” By publishing articles that argued for opposing stances in Spain, Sedgwick was able to avoid an outright statement of support for Franco. This was most clear when he ran two opposing articles from John Langdon-Davies and Ian D. Colvin, titled “The Case for Government” and “The Case for Franco,” respectively.<sup>11</sup> Colvin argued that Franco was not a fascist, but a “regular soldier” who sought to defend “law, order, and civilization” from the chaos that followed the election of 1936 in Spain. In this sense, Colvin identified Franco as an anti-communist who aimed to restore traditional, Catholic Spain. He continues that Franco’s acceptance of German and Italian aid is not a confirmation of fascist intent, but a simple and pragmatic decision in the face of crisis. Part of the crisis that Colvin highlighted was the political violence and anticlerical violence that was committed against the Catholic clergy and churches.<sup>12</sup> This aspect of violence in Spain animated the rationale for Nationalist support among American Catholics, indeed Franco’s most ardent supporters.

Catholics, both among the clergy and the laypeople supported the Nationalist cause in Spain in large numbers, because of the anticlerical violence that occurred before and during the war. Catholics interpreted the violence against members of the clergy as confirmation that Communism was indeed a violent and satanic ideology that prescribed the murder of priests and nuns. However, other religious groups in the United States, such as Protestants and Jews, supported Spain’s Republic in large numbers and engaged in a series of vigorous debates with Catholics. While Protestants demonstrated their intent to oppose Communism within the US, their support for the Republicans in Spain turned a blind eye to Soviet support of the Republican

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<sup>11</sup> Chapman, “Pro-Franco Anti-communism,” 653.

<sup>12</sup> Ian D. Colvin, “The Case for Franco,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 161, 3 (March 1938), 399, 402.

government. Their opposition to Franco was grounded in their definition of the Spanish general as a fascist reactionary, not a savior of Christianity or defender of moral values.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Protestant opposition to Franco's cause may be an extension of anti-Catholic sentiments within various Protestant sects. For Catholics, the anticlerical violence proved to be impossible to ignore. The mention of anticlerical violence in the *Atlantic* was not the first time that American Catholics would learn of this reality. Perhaps the most influential instance that awakened Catholic awareness occurred in 1937, when the *New York Times* printed a letter from several Spanish bishops – followed up by a letter confirming Vatican support of Franco's uprising<sup>14</sup> – that illustrated their perspective of the war and their support for the Nationalist cause.<sup>15</sup> The letter drew a reply from a historian at Columbia, James T. Shotwell, which sparked a series of ensuing letters from Catholic readers who debated Shotwell's response and reaffirmed what they saw as the central justification for Catholic alignment with the Nationalists; "How could one arbitrate with or seek terms from a diabolical force that in six months destroyed or profaned 411 churches and committed some 3,000 transgressions of a political and social character?"<sup>16</sup> While US Protestants seemed able to ignore the violence against the clergy in Spain, committed by communists and other factions of the Spanish left, it is clear that US Catholics could not and would not look away from anticlerical violence. As a result, support for Franco as a defender of Christianity against the evils of communism emerged as a rational position

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<sup>13</sup> J. David Valaik, "American Catholics and the Spanish Civil War, 1931-1939," Dissertation, University of Rochester, 1964, 223-224.

<sup>14</sup> "Spanish Prelates Justify Rebellion; Vatican 'Sympathizes' with a Pastoral Letter Declaring Franco Rising 'Legitimate'," *New York Times*, September 3, 1937.

<sup>15</sup> "Text of Pastoral Letter signed by Spanish Prelates Justifying Franco Rebellion," *New York Times*, September 3, 1937.

<sup>16</sup> John Emmet Carmody, "Letter to the Times; Spanish Bishops Defended," *New York Times*, September 10, 1937.

### III. Americans, William F. Buckley Sr., and Spain

In a 1996 article for *American Historical Review*, historian Richard L. Kagan outlined what he calls “Prescott’s Paradigm,” a framework through which American historians have written about Spanish history that is filtered through an American lens. The name is derived from historian William H. Prescott, whose work on Spanish history juxtaposed Spain and the US in a critical framework that contrasted “Spanish decadence and American progress.”<sup>17</sup> Citing works across the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century that situated Spain as a backwards nation, existing as a counter to American exceptionalism, Prescott’s paradigm shaped American scholars’ view that Spain represented the “antithesis” to America.<sup>18</sup> From this standpoint, the majority of American scholarship on Spain focused on the idea of a perennial Spanish decline.

The onset of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 and the installation of Franco’s dictatorship did little to work against ideas of Spanish decline in American academic circles or among American liberals. In fact, Kagan notes that Franco’s victory most likely renewed the life of Prescott’s paradigm and reinforced American perceptions of Spanish life and culture as inherently backwards.<sup>19</sup> While this view permeated throughout history departments and the resulting works on Spanish history, the American public’s perception of the Spanish conflict was influenced by a different set of factors.

William F. Buckley Sr. subscribed to ideas about Spain and the Spanish Civil War that were different from other American elites. However, Buckley Sr.’s disdain for communism was firmly rooted in his faith and acted in tandem with his passion for Hispanic culture and identity. These ideas were catalyzed by his own experience with revolution in Mexico in the early 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Richard L Kagan, “Prescott’s Paradigm: American Historical Scholarship and the Decline of Spain,” *American Historical Review* 101, no. 2 (1996): 425.

<sup>18</sup> Kagan, “Prescott’s Paradigm: American Historical Scholarship and the Decline of Spain,” 430.

<sup>19</sup> Kagan, “Prescott’s Paradigm: American Historical Scholarship and the Decline of Spain,” 438.

century. William F Buckley Sr. was born in Texas and grew up in a town about 100 miles north of the Mexican border. After finishing college in 1904, he moved to Mexico City where he would stay until 1921.<sup>20</sup> In his seventeen years in Mexico, Buckley Sr. would earn his fortune as a prominent lawyer during the oil boom in Mexico. As a devout Catholic, Buckley Sr. developed good relationships with the Mexican government and oil companies. His thorough knowledge of Spanish was also crucial to his success. It was at this time that Mexico was thrown into unrest and violent revolution. In an attempt to protect the pro-foreign investment Mexican government and the Catholic hierarchy, Buckley Sr. “became an active counterrevolutionary” and helped organized a coup to oust the new Mexican government under Álvaro Obregón. When the coup failed, Obregón expelled Buckley Sr. from Mexico. According to John B. Judis, Buckley Sr. returned to the United States with a “seething hatred of revolution” and interpreted the revolution in Mexico as the opening salvo of a worldwide communist uprising against Catholicism and capitalism. Judis writes, “He did not lose his desire to affect history; he projected it onto his children.” Four years after his return to the United States, in 1925, Buckley Sr. and his wife Aloise welcomed their son William, the seventh of ten children.<sup>21</sup> With his political and religious convictions stronger than ever, Buckley Sr. set out to raise a strong Catholic family and passed down his firm beliefs regarding Catholicism, capitalism, and anti-communism.<sup>22</sup>

Buckley Sr.’s experience in Mexico and his fascination with Hispanic culture and identity was not a unique phenomenon. In an article on Buckley Jr.’s little noted fluency in the Spanish Language, Bécquer Seguíñ noted Buckley Sr.’s fascination with Spain as *Hispanophilia*.<sup>23</sup> This

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<sup>20</sup> John B Judis, *William F. Buckley Jr.*, 19-20, 22.

<sup>21</sup> John B. Judis, *William F Buckley Jr.*, 21-22, 24.

<sup>22</sup> Bécquer Seguíñ, “The Spanish-Speaking William F. Buckley,” *Dissent Magazine*, September 28, 2016, [https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/spanish-speaking-william-f-buckley](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/spanish-speaking-william-f-buckley). According to Professor Bécquer Seguíñ, Buckley Sr. “believed in three things: Catholicism, capitalism, and teaching his children Spanish.”

<sup>23</sup> Seguíñ, *The Spanish-Speaking William F. Buckley*.”

term is used in historian Richard Kagan's work *The Spanish Craze: America's Fascination with the Hispanic World, 1779 – 1939* to describe an upgraded case of what he termed "Spanish Fever."<sup>24</sup> This obsession with Spanish culture and art began in true earnest near the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and consisted of a heavily romanticized view of Spain. Kagan also notes that, in America, one of the leitmotifs of writing about Spain consists of a tension between the Black Legend and White Legend of Spain. In short, Spain appeared in contrasting forms in America, as the malevolent colonial empire who violently oppressed natives in their settling of the New World (the Black legend) and as the bright, sunny, romantic Spain offered in the work of writers such as Washington Irving (the White legend).<sup>25</sup> As noted previously, academia and scholars were more focused on the negative portrayal of a Spain in decline, than on the idea of Spain as a sunny and progressive.

In terms of geography, Kagan identifies that the American regions most "infected" with the Spanish craze were areas formerly under Spanish colonial influence, namely California, Texas, New Mexico, and Florida.<sup>26</sup> This rings true when considering the *Hispanophilia* of someone such as William F. Buckley Sr. Of course, his experience with the Mexican Revolution and the perceived influence of communism would serve to further complicate his fascination with Spain, a traditional Catholic monarchical Spain, and his disdain for the ideology he identified as a grave threat.

These beliefs would animate Buckley Sr.'s perspective on world events throughout the early twentieth century. Buckley Sr. "saw the demand for political democracy in countries like Mexico, Venezuela, and Spain as a cover for communism and anticlericalism." His Catholic faith

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<sup>24</sup> Richard L. Kagan, *The Spanish Craze: America's Fascination with the Hispanic World, 1779 – 1939*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 3-4.

<sup>25</sup> Kagan, *The Spanish Craze*, 22-23.

<sup>26</sup> Kagan, *The Spanish Craze*, 6.



influenced him to view communism not just as a foreign ideology, but as a “satanic faith that threatened the soul of Western civilization.”<sup>27</sup> Given his experience with revolution and Mexico and his fervent disdain for communism, it is therefore no surprise that Buckley Sr. threw his support behind Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War. Buckley Sr. did not identify Franco as a fascist, but a Catholic counterrevolutionary.<sup>28</sup> In raising his children, Buckley Sr. incorporated this view and others regarding Spanish culture and identity into their education.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps none of his children would accept and further these ideas as much as did William F. Buckley Jr. He became “his father’s foremost disciple and the most militantly political of the Buckley children.” Absorbing the education, private tutoring sessions, and dinner table conversations with his father, Buckley Jr. “quickly became the most outspoken proponent of his father’s conservative views.”<sup>30</sup> When Buckley Jr. burst onto the scene as public figure for the first time, he effectively conveyed the conservatism of his father, molded and shaped by his experience at Yale, in a memoir of his undergraduate years.

In 1951, William F. Buckley Jr. published his memoir *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of “Freedom”* and recalled his undergraduate years at Yale University from 1946 to 1950. In it, he describes his contempt for Yale’s policy of academic freedom. What Yale termed academic freedom was, in Buckley’s view, a “protective label” that masked “an extraordinarily irresponsible educational attitude that, under the protective label “academic

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<sup>27</sup> Judis, *William F. Buckley Jr.*, 27. Note that Buckley Sr.’s view that demands for democracy were covers for communist takeovers can be traced to Buckley Jr.’s notion that academic freedom at Yale was a cover for Marxist indoctrination. Later, Buckley’s first article covering Franco in *NR* would adopt a similar mindset that Buckley Sr. fashioned, that Franco was a counterrevolutionary interested first and foremost in halting the spread of communism.

<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Buckley Jr. would employ very similar language and ideas about Franco and his cause in *NR* decades later.

<sup>29</sup> Buckley Jr. biographer John B Judis points to a memory retold by William Coleman, a friend of the Buckley family, who witnessed Buckley Sr. instructing his children on the nature of the Spanish Civil War and his position on the European payment of war debts. Judis, *William F. Buckley JR.*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Judis, *William F Buckley Jr.*, 34.

freedom,” has produced one of the most extraordinary incongruities of our time: the institution that derives its moral and financial support from Christian individualists and then addresses itself to the task of persuading the sons of these supporters to be atheistic socialists.”<sup>31</sup> Buckley’s response via *God and Man at Yale* to this perceived affront to traditional American culture and values would elevate Buckley to national recognition and set him on a trajectory to redefining American politics.

Buckley’s central concern with Yale would prove to be a microcosm of the transformation of American conservatism that would occur throughout the 1950s into the 1970s. In a shift away from the conservatism of the previous decades, Buckley’s ideas provided a “fusion” of sorts that drew together various splintered factions on the right, such as party-line Republicans, libertarians, and Catholics.<sup>32</sup> He was an important leader in the effort to popularize conservatism and coalesce numerous right-wing groups. Indeed, most modern-day conservatives point to Buckley as the “patron saint” of American conservatism.<sup>33</sup> Buckley continued to gain prominence in the postwar period, and he began to synthesize many of his ideas that would become important foundations for the publication that serves as the central analytical focus of this paper, the *National Review*.

This was the precursor to an intellectual movement on the American right that would create the conservative movement. By the time he founded the *National Review* in 1955, conservatism in the postwar United States had taken on a distinct new form, spearheaded by a

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<sup>31</sup> William F. Buckley Jr, *God and Man at Yale: The Superstitions of “Academic Freedom* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), xv-xvi.

<sup>32</sup> Carl T. Bogus, *Buckley: William F. Buckley Jr. and the Rise of American Conservatism* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 11-13.

<sup>33</sup> John B. Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.: Patron Saint of the Conservatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., 1988). Buckley was more the “patron saint” of modern-day conservatism that would influence Barry Goldwater’s presidential campaign and later the presidency of Ronald Reagan.

Catholic Yale graduate skilled in writing and public speaking. Buckley Jr., with *NR*, attempted to ground a new conservatism based on anti-communism that placed importance on traditional American democracy, an idea that his father was not supportive of. The American conservative movement was influenced by Buckley's project to bring in old and new conservatives, Catholics and non-Catholics, under one cohesive ideology. That project was *NR* and it offered a brand of anti-communist conservatism that supported American institutions and ideals. This was distinctive from Buckley Sr.'s Catholic anti-communism, which was weary of democracy as well.

#### IV. Postwar Conservatism in the United States

Across intellectual, cultural, and philosophical lines, American conservatism's history is not one of frequent consensus. It is telling that the first essay in the anthology *American Conservatism* is titled "A History of Inherent Contradictions." In the opening essay, James Kurth outlines political analysts' interpretative framework for distinctive political movements. This framework divides US conservatism into three factions: "free-enterprise" conservatives, "traditional values" conservatives, and "patriotic" conservatives.<sup>34</sup> This rings true for postwar conservatives, especially considering that Buckley's concerns at Yale were economic, political, and cultural in nature.<sup>35</sup> So, with this recent framework for analyzing political movements, and its delineation of US conservatism in mind, what differentiated postwar conservatism in the US from its counterparts in history both in Europe and America?

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<sup>34</sup> James R. Kurth, "A History of Inherent Contradictions: The Origins and End of American Conservatism," in *American Conservatism*, eds. Sanford V. Levinson, Joel Parker, and Melissa S. Williams (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 13-14. Kurth draws upon ideas expressed in George H. Nash's *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America, since 1945*, 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary ed. (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006).

<sup>35</sup> Buckley Jr., *God and Man at Yale*, xiii-xix.

Postwar conservatism was characterized by a unification, or rather a coalition, of various factions on the right of the US political spectrum, namely fundamentalists of a constitutional and religious nature, and libertarians.<sup>36</sup> Scholars David Sidorsky and Patrick J. Deneen highlight three particular elements of modern conservatism that best describe this fusion. Economic libertarians, whose advocacy for a free market aligned with Buckley's economic beliefs, were heavily influenced by ideas from such figures as Milton Friedman, Ayn Rand, and Friedrich Hayek.<sup>37</sup> Scholar George Nash also draws these distinctions in *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*. Nash outlines different sects of the initial thrust of the movement which are still used to differentiate conservative schools of thought. Libertarians, or classical liberals, the "new conservatives" and anti-communists were the three central intellectual forces of postwar conservatism. In regard to the anti-communists, Nash claims that this third school was a "militant, evangelistic anti-Communism, shaped by a number of influential ex-radicals...including Whitaker Chambers, James Burnham, Frank Meyer, and many more."<sup>38</sup>

This fusion of conservative and libertarian ideals distinguished modern conservatism from the conservatism of the past and strengthened conservatism in its opposition to liberalism. It is important to note that the central unifying belief of conservatives, both economically and security minded, as well as libertarians was a disdain for communism. Frank Meyer, the fusionist, was especially influential to Buckley and his effort to fuse together different groups on the right. He would serve as a contributor to *NR* periodically.

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<sup>36</sup> Sanford V. Levinson, Joel Parker, and Melissa S. Williams, *American Conservatism* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 5. Libertarians can be defined as political moderates, in terms of the American political spectrum, who advocate for limited central government, much in the tradition of John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Jefferson.

<sup>37</sup> Patrick J. Deneen, "Conservatism in America? A Response to Sidorsky," in *American Conservatism* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 148-149.

<sup>38</sup> George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement Since 1945*, (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), xx-xxi.

Historians of conservatism in the postwar and Cold War era rightly identify Buckley as a central and significantly influential actor. But conservatism in the United States did not begin with Buckley in 1951, though modern conservatism in this context can certainly be traced back to this moment. Buckley popularized fusionist conservatism, bringing in a myriad of groups on the right together, and traced the origins of his brand of conservatism to roots in many other intellectual and philosophical sources, namely that of Edmund Burke. A diachronic understanding of conservatism in the United States is crucial to revealing the essence of Buckley's fusionist conservatism and why it became a popular and powerful force in US politics.

Nash's important distinction regarding *NR* and the movement under present discussion was the presence of "fission" among the fusion that *NR* sought to establish. The formation of the intellectual movement that was conservatism required gleanings from time to time. For example, centrist conservatives, such as Peter Vireck, were ousted by the Buckley and Meyer circle of conservatives. Nash makes it clear that Buckley's conservatism made "liberalism itself the target... The enemy was the Left, period – not just its extremist fringe."<sup>39</sup> Other stark disagreements occurred, including between Whitaker Chambers and Ayn Rand, over the publication of her immensely popular book *Atlas Shrugged* in 1957. While many conservatives praised the work, others came to Chamber's side, including Frank Meyer and Russel Kirk. Buckley would eventually reflect on his dislike of the book as well.<sup>40</sup> However, Kirk would not remain in the "inner circle" of this new movement for long.

Russell Kirk's book *The Conservative Mind*, originally published in 1953, was one of many important works on conservatism in this period. It traced conservative ideas from Burke's

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<sup>39</sup> George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement Since 1945*, 236-237.

<sup>40</sup> Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement Since 1945*, 240-241.

1790 publication *Reflections on the Revolution in France* as they evolved through history.<sup>41</sup> His definition of conservatism, and his development of “six canons of conservative thought,” significantly omits any discussion of free market economics, a key concern for conservatives of Buckley’s caliber. Indeed, Kirk’s fifth canon runs counter to Buckley’s focus on economics as a defining principle of postwar American conservatism. Kirk’s fifth canon reads “Faith in prescription and distrust of ‘sophisters, calculators, and economists’ who would reconstruct society upon abstract signs.”<sup>42</sup> While Kirk’s influence on conservatism has not always been fully accounted for, he appears as source of contest between other conservatives and libertarians. Kirk notably did not embrace the ideas of Joseph McCarthy and often clashed with ideas expressed in the *National Review*, though he contributed to a *NR* column “From the Academy.”<sup>43</sup> This is one significant disagreement between the brand of conservatism popularized by Buckley and that of Kirk. Buckley co-authored a book with his brother in law, L. Brent Bozell, *McCarthy and his Enemies* to defend the anti-communist senator and his campaign to purge the US of communists.<sup>44</sup> Buckley’s idea of a new conservative movement was focused primarily on anti-communism, while Kirk’s intellectual conservatism was rooted more in historical conservatism and the ideas of Burke.

Scholars and indeed Republicans identify Kirk as potentially even more influential to conservatism than Buckley, especially in relation to the movements philosophical and intellectual roots. Kirk’s first canon of conservatism, “belief in a transcendent order,” prescribed religious belief, in effect Christian and biblical belief, to conservatives as an alternative to

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<sup>41</sup> Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1978), 5.

<sup>42</sup> Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 7-8.

<sup>43</sup> Matthew Continetti, “The Forgotten Father of American Conservatism,” *The Atlantic*, October 19, 2018. See also John P East, *The American Conservative Movement: The Philosophical Founders* (Chicago: Regnery Books, 1986).

<sup>44</sup> Judis, *William F Buckley Jr*, 104-105.

modern thinking.<sup>45</sup> Buckley's Catholic faith influenced his thinking when he published *God and Man at Yale* and when he founded *NR*; Christian belief and the importance of tradition, as foundational ideas to postwar conservatism, link Kirk and Buckley along intellectual lines.

Kirk's claims regarding individualism, however, did not fall in line with the conservatism of Buckley. Meyer and Kirk would clash over this point and many others, as Kirk's views starkly differed from the individualist, free-market enterprise views of Buckley and Meyer.<sup>46</sup> As co-editor of *NR* and associate of Buckley, Meyer would have much more significant influence on *NR* and its brand of conservatism than Kirk.

American conservatism's roots in Europe, and Burke especially, are not its only European influence. European born political theorists and philosophers who emigrated to the United States were also important to the conservative movement. In his book *The American Conservative Movement*, Senator John P East identified seven significant thinkers who influenced conservatism, three of whom came from Europe. Leo Strauss and Eric Voegelin were born in Germany and Ludwig von Mises was native to Austria. In terms of influence on Buckley and the conservatives at *NR*, Strauss was the most consequential.<sup>47</sup> Strauss disagreed with other conservatives, including Buckley, on a variety of issues. But, he contributed to the codification of this new doctrine of conservatism that would rapidly gain popularity. Many scholars and conservative thinkers credit Buckley alone with the combining elements of social, economic, and religious conservatism under one ideological umbrella.<sup>48</sup> But this view does not properly recognize the contributions of other intellectuals and theorists. The German born Strauss

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<sup>45</sup> Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 7. See also John P. East, *The American Conservative Movement*, 33.

<sup>46</sup> Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement Since 1945*, 246. Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, 211.

<sup>47</sup> See Nathan Tarcov's essay "Leo Strauss and American Conservative Thought," in *American Conservatism*, eds. Sanford V. Levinson, Joel Parker, and Melissa S. Williams (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 381-397.

<sup>48</sup> Carl T. Bogus, "Fighting over the Conservative Banner," in *American Conservatism*, 337.

contributed to this end as well, even if only by providing a consistent dissenting voice within the conservative movement. His political theorizing and thinking cemented the intellectual underpinnings of the unification of conservatives, though he only publicly engaged on the topic of conservatism three times, according to University of Chicago Professor Nathan Tarcov.<sup>49</sup> Similar to Kurth, Strauss provided significant philosophical and intellectual support for conservatism, but did not shy away from debates that occurred within the movement.

The problems and divisions created by Strauss among conservatives, and Buckley in particular, were formidably countered by Willmoore Kendall. A supporter of the Spanish Republic during the Spanish Civil War, he became a devout anti-communist in the years following the war's conclusion. His experience in Spain heavily influenced his beliefs that communism represented a true threat to America and this anti-communism pushed him into the conservative movement. He taught at Yale, befriending none other than Buckley Jr., and would become a senior editor at *NR* in 1955.<sup>50</sup> His work and writing throughout the 1950s and 1960s was important to the conservative movement, but he too would provide an example of dissent within the intellectual movement.

Conservatives at *NR* identified his brand of conservatism as trending towards populism. Nash notes that this is a “tricky” term, but cites writings from prominent conservatives such as Meyer, Kirk, and even Buckley, who possessed significant doubts of his line of thinking. Others, however, praised Kendall for his work on political heritage and conservatism in the United States. One such figure was Jeffrey Hart of Dartmouth College.<sup>51</sup> Hart was a contributor and

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<sup>49</sup> Tarcov, “Leo Strauss and American Conservative Thought,” in *American Conservatism*, 391-393. Professor Tarcov's full title is Professor of Social Thought and Political Science and in the College and Director of the Leo Strauss Center, University of Chicago.

<sup>50</sup> Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement since 1945*, 359-362. Kendall would convert to Catholicism in 1956, and Nash notes that the Church's anti-communist tradition may have influenced his decision to convert, especially because he was a religious skeptic previously.

<sup>51</sup> Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement since 1945*, 388.



editor for *NR* and penned the article that section VII of this paper focuses on. Hart also produced his own history of *NR*, titled *Making of the American Conservative Mind: National Review and Its Times*.

In terms of religious participation, scholars have noted that a key defining characteristic of the conservative movement of the postwar period was the influence of religious intellectuals. Patrick Allitt recognizes this influence in *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America, 1950-1985*. He argues against the prevailing logic of the time (1993) that conservatism owed more to evangelical Protestantism and libertarians than to Catholics. Buckley is the obvious example, but other Catholic laypeople in this period were able to substantially influence the political and moral views of the new conservative movement.<sup>52</sup> This was especially true during the 1950s.

The 1950s was a period when many new conservatives became politically active, including Catholics. In *NR* and other conservative publications that began to appear, conservatives began to flesh out new ideas in the columns and periodicals that would begin to circulate amongst the American public. While their activities can be viewed through a reactionary lens, to the legacy of the New Deal, Allitt recognizes that Catholics viewed the moment as “a special opportunity to lead a conservative revival and believed such a revival was necessary if the civilization of the Christian West...was to be preserved.”<sup>53</sup> The preservation of Christian, Western civilization against the invading ideology of communism was a frame of reference shared by American Catholics in the postwar period and Spanish Catholics during the

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<sup>52</sup> Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America*, 6-7.

<sup>53</sup> Patrick Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals and Conservative Politics in America*, 49. Concerns about Western Civilization will appear as a concern regarding Franco and Spain in the *National Review* during the 1950s.

Spanish Civil War. However, the course of American history moving from the 1950s into the 1960s and 1970s would see the Catholic influence on conservative politics gradually diminish.

The idea of “Western Civilization” was important to American conservatives and especially Catholic conservatives. Allitt identified that Catholics during the Cold War “understood communism as a Christian heresy, viewed the events of the cold war in religious terms, and believed themselves to be the new defenders of the heartland of Christendom...”<sup>54</sup> They defined Western Civilization as the traditional, Christian, democratic society that had emerged in Europe and was now grounded in the United States. Catholics were important actors in the move to forego the isolationism of past conservatism and take an active role in combating communism. The US was understood to be the “champion of the West” and “Christendom’s last great guardian.”<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the term Western Civilization as it was defined by conservatives, particularly Catholics, is interchangeable with Christendom. In a binary understanding of the world as Christendom against atheistic communism, it is no surprise that the Spanish Civil War was interpreted as an assault on the West, with traditional institutions like the Catholic Church under assault from the left. This view was supported by American Catholics during the war and Franco’s historiography of the war as a crusade to save Spain from those who would destroy the West aligned with this idea.

A prominent conservative and *NR* editor and contributor that fully engaged with the idea of Western Civilization was Jeffrey Hart. As noted above, he supported the ideas of Willmoore Kendall and devoted himself to anti-communism. The true synthesis of his anti-communist leanings become apparent later, in his article “The Great Guernica Fraud,” published in 1973. In his memoir, Hart wrote that “The Christian religion had been a leading constituent of Western

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<sup>54</sup> Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals*, 81.

<sup>55</sup> Allitt, *Catholic Intellectuals*, 2.

civilization from the beginning...”<sup>56</sup> The belief in Western civilization, or Christendom, influenced many of the anti-communist conservatives at *NR*. As a central and unifying belief, Christianity and the West represented the natural enemy and antithetical ideology to atheistic communism. If anti-communism reverberated throughout the conservative movement as a central principle, then the belief of the superiority of the West and Christendom strengthened this view among religious conservatives.

While the roots of the “rebirth,” “reinvention,” and “rebranding,” of conservatism lay in the 1950s, real results did not manifest until the 1970s with truly consequential developments taking place in the 1980s under the presidency of Ronald Reagan. The period spanning 1930 to 1970, roughly speaking, has been termed the time of “liberal consensus” in the US. While there were certainly conservative elements within the Republican party, they were firmly in the minority and did not exert any real measured influence.<sup>57</sup> After publishing *God and Man at Yale*, Buckley was able to consolidate the various groups within the Republican party and truly formulate a conservative census in terms of policy and political culture through *NR*. That consensus was tightly weaved together by anti-communism. The significant conservative publication of the postwar and later Cold War period, the *National Review*, appeared as an outgrowth of the Catholic conservative right, with Buckley at the helm, to “stand athwart history, yelling Stop, at a time when no one is inclined to do so, or to have much patience with those who so urge it.”<sup>58</sup> The process of unifying and coalescing the varying factions of the American right under one ideological heading began in the fall of 1955.

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<sup>56</sup> Jeffrey Hart, *The Making of the American Conservative Mind: National Review and Its Times*, (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), 115.

<sup>57</sup> Kurth, “A History of Inherent Contradictions,” in *American Conservatism*, 27-28.

<sup>58</sup> William F. Buckley Jr, “Publisher’s Statement,” in *National Review*, November 19, 1955.

The modern cultural conservatism of Buckley and *NR* accomplished the fusion of disparate groups on the right under the umbrella of anti-communism. Unified in their belief of the superiority of Western Civilization, and the threat that communism represented to the West, Franco appeared as a natural ally. Just as he was an attractive character to Catholics in the 1930s, such as William Buckley Sr., he captured the attention of the new anti-communist conservatives. Franco, who had defeated communism in his own country – according to conservatives – appealed to the central anti-communist and pro-Western concerns of Buckley and *NR* contributors. Conservatives framed Franco against this lens and portrayed him as a symbol of hope to the West that a moral, traditional Catholic, leader could triumph over communism.

#### V. Franco's Spain, An Ally of Christendom

In all of *NR*'s writings and articles on Franco and Spain, the most explicitly symbolic language which painted Franco as a member of Western Civilization appears in the obituary published in 1975 by Buckley Jr.'s brother, Frederick Robert Buckley. An editor's note before the obituary reads that as the issue was going to press, "General Franco is still, technically, alive."<sup>59</sup> The obituary that F.R. Buckley penned, although nuanced in his treatment of the Spanish dictator, was nonetheless positive as a whole. F.R began by recounting a brief dialogue between an underling and Franco, which apparently took place during a hunting trip. Upon passing along the news that Cuban rebels had ousted President Fulgencio Batista, Franco is reported to have said, "*Siempre lo he dicho, estos dictadores acabarán mal.*" (*I've always said these dictators will come to a bad end*). F.R offers the following analysis regarding this alleged statement.

"Thus he viewed himself. Not as a dictator of Spain (which he was), and not as the ogre of left-wing myth (which he was not), but as the sometimes necessarily

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<sup>59</sup> F. R. Buckley, "Francisco Franco," in *National Review*, November 21, 1974, 1283.

stern but always benevolent father of the great mob of unruly and capricious and grand and wonderful but often irresponsible pack of children who were his countrymen, children who back in the 1930s had got themselves in a very bad way, who because of their lack of discipline and forgetfulness of the real values of True Spain – the great Christian monarchical Spain of the period of the Conquests – had nearly succumbed to the horrors of anarchism and communism; they had nearly brought about the destruction of the beloved fatherland that he, Francisco Franco Bahamonde, had been designated by Almighty God to save, bring back to sanity...and lead into a better future all the great values and traditions restored and with the children finally grown up.”<sup>60</sup>

Beginning with a friendly conversation between hunters certainly paints Franco in a light that many Americans might identify with. But this sentence (it is, in fact, one long sentence), summarizes *NR*'s, and indeed conservatives', view of a symbolic Franco that was a dictator, but a necessary dictator, a benevolent father.<sup>61</sup> F.R. herewith presents all of the points of symbolic representation of Franco discussed in this present study. One, he was not fairly treated or portrayed realistically in liberal political thought. Two, he was a defender of the traditions, identity, and history of “True Spain.” Three, he prevented the destruction of his nation and lead them to a brighter future, restoring the true values and morals of Spain along the way. And finally, he was chosen by God for this task. Franco alone was entrusted by “Almighty God” to reinstall monarchical rule that submitted to God and restore historical Spain. Finally, FR Buckley offered all of this within the condescending analogy of a father-child relationship. This highly symbolic portrayal of Franco contains echoes of crusade historiography and effectively paints Franco as an ally of Christendom whose legacy should reflect his devotion to anti-communism and traditional Spain.

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<sup>60</sup> F.R. Buckley, “Francisco Franco,” 1283-1284.

<sup>61</sup> It is revealing that, up to this point, Franco's classification as a dictator was absent from *NR* articles and essays on Spain.

While the definition of “Western Civilization” in US circles has shifted over time, the presence of communism and its atheist principles united the varying elements of Christianity in the US and Europe.<sup>62</sup> For conservatives, the symbol of Franco as a Catholic world leader highlighted his importance as an ally against communism. Furthermore, the identification of Franco as a part of the “West” reveals conservatives’ Eurocentric perspective of history, elevating “the West” to a position of superiority.

Particularly in the 1960s, and towards the end of Franco’s regime and life in 1975, *NR* advanced the idea that Franco was a vital part of the West and an ally in the Cold War. Specifically, *NR* writers commented on economic and political developments in Spain that were either misconstrued or not covered in the American press. *NR* support for Spain and Franco along this line was characterized by economic concerns and political controversies, but these instances were espoused in language that placed Franco and Spain in league with the West and Christendom.

In terms of economics, *NR* and conservative support for Franco’s Spain took the form of essays and articles which claimed that, as a non-communist nation, Spain deserved American foreign aid. The first example of this type appeared in March 1957, wherein *NR* criticized a *New York Times* article which argued that the US should extend aid to Poland. In an indirect rebuke of communist led countries, and the apparent sympathy towards these nations held by the *NYT*, they describe Franco in the following terms.

“The government of Francisco Franco is unattractive to us for many reasons. But Franco is a part, and an integral part, of Western Civilization. He represents the multifarious political, philosophical, religious and cultural tendencies that have shaped Spanish history. The nature of his dictatorship is organically different from that of the communists...”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Matthew Burton Bowman, *Christian: The Politics of a Word in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 109-110.

<sup>63</sup> “Beyond the ‘Times,’” in *National Review*, March 9, 1957, 221.

There are a few important points one must draw from this statement. First, Franco is portrayed as an ally to the US and the West by the conservative editors and contributors at *NR*. The usage of the moniker “western civilization” underscored conservative adherence to the idea that communism was an ideology that threatened to destroy the West. On every level, politically, culturally, socially, and economically, communism threatened traditional Christendom. As a foundational idea for the new conservatives of the 1950s, anti-communism meant that any opponent of communism in the world must be adopted as an ally and made immune to scrutiny. By painting Spain as part of “Western Civilization,” the new conservatives at *NR* telegraphed their intention to bring Spain in as an ally in the Cold War, regardless of his dictatorship which ran counter to American and indeed conservative traditions and ideals, such as individual liberty, freedom of the press, among others. This also represents a significant break with past American values and ideas about Spain in terms of the black legend and monarchical Spain running counter to American exceptionalism.<sup>64</sup> The coming conflict with communism represented a war for the future of civilization, where the West might be defeated and destroyed. Because Franco defeated communism, and represented the traditional identity of Catholic Spain, he was viewed as a part of Christendom and a bulwark against Soviet communism.

Second, Franco is portrayed as the synthesis of numerous “tendencies” that molded Spanish history. The degree to which the majority of conservative contributors were aware of the intricacies of Spanish history is unclear. However, recall that Buckley’s education and upbringing was influenced by an understanding of Spanish and, more broadly, Hispanic culture,

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<sup>64</sup> Historian Richard L. Kagan has noted this influence along with other aspects of American idealized imagery of Spain. See *The Spanish Craze: America’s Fascination with the Hispanic World, 1779-1939* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019). Richard L. Kagan has noted the influence of Spanish history and culture on an American imagined view of Spain. The “black legend” in particular has characterized American thinking on Spain for quite some time.

history, and identity. Buckley's knowledge of Spanish history certainly influenced *NR*'s position here regarding Franco as the likely proponent of a traditional, Catholic Spain. Spain, not unlike many nations and entities across time, endured a long and arduous journey leading up to the 1930s and the Spanish Civil War.

Economic arguments about Franco's Spain that were influenced by his perceived membership of Western Civilization would continue in the 1960s. As Spain underwent economic liberalization, *NR* commented on this trend and the instance in which Spain was rejected for membership to the European common market. First, in 1962, *NR* published an article titled "Spanish Growing Pains." This article was written by the European intellectual Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, a close associate of Buckley Jr. who would serve as a columnist for *NR* for 35 years. Like Leo Strauss, Kuehnelt-Leddihn was a European political thinker who influenced the conservative movement of the postwar and Cold War period. As an intellectual himself, Buckley was fond of Kuehnelt-Leddihn, calling him a "walking book of knowledge in a 1985 *NR* article."<sup>65</sup> He spoke eight languages and allegedly could read seventeen more, placing him squarely in line with the intellectuals who spearheaded the conservative movement. However, Kuehnelt-Leddihn was a monarchist and, like Buckley Sr., was wary of democracy.<sup>66</sup> This reality comes across in many of his articles on politics in Europe, including Spain.

The article "Spanish Growing Pains" fit into a framework of economic articles on Spain that highlighted political and economic progress in an attempt to justify aid for Spain and portray Spain as an ally of the West. Writing on the wave of liberalism and labor strikes occurring in Spain, Kuehnelt-Leddihn analyzed the degree to which this reflected a chance for meaningful

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<sup>65</sup> William F Buckley Jr., "A Walking Book of Knowledge," in *National Review*, December 31, 1985, 104.

<sup>66</sup> Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement Since 1945*, 97. Nash called Kuehnelt-Leddihn "the link between the continental European conservative tradition and the conservative stirrings in America in the postwar decade."



economic progress in Spain. He takes the Spanish Civil war into account, reasoning that the “disastrous” conflict could be responsible for the plight of Spain in the early 1960s, though concluding this line of thinking with the claim that “the recent wave of strikes, certainly fanned and abetted by non-Western powers, raised demands which Spanish industry could meet only with the greatest difficulty...”<sup>67</sup> The claim that the strikes were made worse or more prominent by the influence of “non-Western” powers is similar to Buckley’s and other *NR* articles on Spain, both on the civil war and the following decades. Even Kuehnelt-Leddihn struggles to acknowledge the reality that the strikes arose from Spanish discontent with their current economic situation. Indeed, “non-Western” powers is a thinly veiled accusation that communist influence incited the strikes. The disclaimer that he is “not saying that the highly statist economic policy preceding the present free-market policy should not be blamed for the present state of affairs...”<sup>68</sup> simply does not adequately support the argument that foreign influence exacerbated the strikes; an argument made with no evidence to support it.

Kuehnelt-Leddihn made his anti-democratic tendencies clear in a previous *NR* article from 1957. Titled “Crisis in the Latin Countries,” Kuehnelt-Leddihn claims that, on the topic of liberty and order, “It’s different in the Latin world where individualism is rampant... where ideology dominates the scene...” On Franco and Spain, he writes that “The narrowness of Franco’s regime might be the lesser evil as compared with the dangerous flux and total lack of continuity we see in France and Italy, countries whose gyrations remind the intelligent Spaniard that of all remedies to his woes ‘democracy’ would be the least effective.”<sup>69</sup> It should come as no surprise that a traditional monarchist like Kuehnelt-Leddihn would not prescribe democratic

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<sup>67</sup> Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, “Spanish Growing Pains,” in *National Review*, August 14, 1962, 98.

<sup>68</sup> Kuehnelt-Leddihn, “Spanish Growing Pains,” 98.

<sup>69</sup> Erik von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, “Crisis in the Latin Countries,” in *National Review*, July 6, 1957.

government as a solution to Spanish issues. According to Kuehnelt-Leddihn, with Franco in control (albeit with Kuehnelt-Leddihn's own disclaimer of "narrowness") Spain would see more stability than its surrounding neighbors.

On the topic of the Common Market issuing a veto against Spain joining as a member, *NR* noted a lack of discussion of this fact in the American press. In April 1964, an essay appeared in *NR* criticizing the lack of publicity surrounding the veto. According to *NR*, the decision to veto Spain's admission, primarily made by Belgium and Italy, was made on ideological grounds and not economics.<sup>70</sup> It was the intention of *NR* in this short essay, especially given the title "Remember the Alcazar," to argue that European nations should think more of the Christian history of Spain centuries earlier as opposed to the recent history of Spain's civil war. This supports the notion that Spain acted on the conservative imaginary as a symbol of the legacy of Christianity and bedrock of the history of Christianity, regardless of Franco's dictatorship. However, this more strongly shows that the new conservatives of this period were significantly interested in free-market economics and free trade. Because of the veto against Spain, the hope for a truly free and common market in Europe was put on hold. It is fortunate here, then, that *NR* had already established a reputation for defending Spain on the basis of culture, religion, and ideology.

Buckley and *NR* would continue to use religious and symbolic language when discussing political events in Spain along similar lines to their articles covering economics. While covering political developments in Spain, *NR* also remarked on the nature of the relationship between the US and Spain, especially at the level of the executive branch. This is made clear in 1962, when *NR* wrote about the deterioration of official relations between Spain and President John F.

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<sup>70</sup> "Remember the Alcazar," in *National Review*, April 21, 1964, 307.

Kennedy. Titled “Conspiracy against Spain?,” *NR* argued that the deterioration of relations originated from the Franco government learning of an alleged meeting between President Kennedy and Spanish Republican representatives. In the meeting, Kennedy purportedly demonstrated his willingness to oppose dictatorships, both of the left and the right. *NR* reported that at this meeting, Kennedy affirmed his belief that the Franco regime was a right-wing dictatorship and that “the United States would help the Spanish Republicans end the Franco era.”<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, *NR* reminded readers that the US had established military bases in Spain and that this should have given Spain “sufficient guarantee against a plot by the President of the United States to overthrow the Spanish Government.”<sup>72</sup> The usage of language such as “plot” and “overthrow” was decidedly incendiary. The incendiary language here paled in comparison to the letter sent to the US by Blas Piñar, a politician and later far-right party leader, in response to this alleged meeting. While the letter was originally published in *Diario ABC* Madrid, *NR* reprinted the letter in a bulletin on March 6, 1962.

The political objective to tarnish the reputation of President Kennedy is clear, but the language used by *NR* here to describe the episode reveals not only opposition to Kennedy, but a reaffirmation of conservative anti-communism and justification for the legitimacy of Franco’s Spain. In the mind of the conservatives of this period, the status quo of American foreign policy was much too soft on communism and much too tough on an ally like Spain. Because they viewed communism as the true enemy, they were confused by this apparent commitment from Kennedy to “overthrow” Franco’s Spain. It is this perceived hypocrisy that led to their publication of Piñar’s letter. In it, a list of charges against the United States appeared like “shotgun blasts” against the hypocrisy of the United States. But among the accusations of

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<sup>71</sup> “Conspiracy against Spain?” in *National Review*, June 5, 1962, 397.

<sup>72</sup> “Conspiracy against Spain?” in *National Review*, June 5, 1962, 397.

hypocrisy, *NR* called attention to a “significant charge”<sup>73</sup> that echoed the exact sentiments of the new conservatives in the 1960s. Piñar wrote that Americans are “cowardly and trembling people who today call attention to the dangers of Communism but who have allied themselves to Communism and turned countries and peoples over to it.”<sup>74</sup> This statement is essentially a characterization of *NR* conservatives’ views on American foreign policy during the postwar period. It comes as no surprise that *NR* would reprint the letter; as an attack on the Kennedy administration and a resounding affirmation that the current US government is not truly anti-communist by their own definition, and certainly not by the conservative definition. Piñar, in one swift stroke, summarized *NR*’s position on communism that they had worked to instill into public discourse since its founding in 1955.

*NR* concluded the article with an explanation as to why the Spanish government under Franco might believe the notion that Kennedy would pledge to end the Franco dictatorship. Citing the nature of the intelligence and a series of “rebuffs and insults” from the Kennedy Administration, *NR* writers arrived at the position that Franco would believe the report on the basis that it is a “well-known fact that the president is surrounded by men for whom hatred of the Spanish Government is an article of faith.”<sup>75</sup> However, the rationale of this essay regarding a conspiracy against Spain must be called into question.

*NR*’s effort to affirm Franco’s Spain as a member of the West extended into other contentious political issues, such as capital punishment. Buckley would write about Franco, Spain, and capital punishment in his syndicated column, “On the Right” in October 1975. The essay commented on the international response levied against the government of Spain for

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<sup>73</sup> “Conspiracy against Spain?” in *National Review*, June 5, 1962, 397.

<sup>74</sup> Blas Piñar, “Hypocrites,” originally published in *Diario ABC Madrid*, reprinted in *NR Bulletin*, March 6, 1962.

<sup>75</sup> “Conspiracy against Spain?” in *National Review*, June 5, 1962, 398.

sentencing eleven political prisoners to death for murder.<sup>76</sup> While Franco commuted six of the sentences, the other five were executed by firing squad. Buckley highlighted the apparent hypocrisy of the American media and of the international community. Criticizing the press in the US and Europe, Buckley stated that “you would have thought Franco was executing five of Our Lord’s 12 apostles: for the sin of going about the world preaching faith, hope, and charity.”<sup>77</sup> Buckley continues his explanation of what he sees as a curious reaction by the international community, noting that the Pope had not made any effort to speak against “Catholic France” for sending convicted murderers to the guillotine but protested Spain’s executions. Buckley arrives at the conclusion that the outrage must arise from the fact that the executions were “political murders,” to which Buckley responds with, “So?”<sup>78</sup> Buckley’s worldview prioritized order over authority and he supports this premise with the idea that political murders, insofar as they are killings committed for political motives, should be more harshly punished than murders committed for other motives. In a manner similar to *NR*’s past writings on Franco and Spain, the defense of the regime against “hypocritical” attacks from various sources demonstrates a willingness to align with authoritarian policies. They do not advocate for Spain or Franco explicitly, however. Rather, they place themselves firmly in opposition to those who would oppose Franco’s Spain. In a sense, they are employing an anti-anti-Franco ideology. This allows for an easy defense against accusations of pro-Fascist sentiment, but the connection, however tenuous, is present, nonetheless.

By the 1970s, *NR* had reached the climax of its symbolic representation of Franco. What began with Buckley Jr. in the 1950s reached its zenith with this obituary in 1975. One wonders

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<sup>76</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., “Franco’s Executions – On the Right,” in *National Review*, October 24, 1975, 1193.

<sup>77</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., “Franco’s Executions – On the Right,” in *National Review*, October 24, 1975, 1193.

<sup>78</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., “Franco’s Executions – On the Right,” in *National Review*, October 24, 1975, 1193.

what Buckley Jr. might have written in an obituary of Franco, but after this treatment levied by his brother, another obituary was doubtfully necessary. In this decade, *NR* continued in earnest with its commitment to defend Franco with an anti-anti-Franco ideology. It ramped up its symbolic language and perpetuation of crusade historiography significantly with the publication of Hart's revisionist piece on Guernica, Buckley Jr.'s defense of Franco's political executions, and F.R. Buckley's flattering obituary of the late Spanish dictator. The conservative imagination, influenced by Catholic intellectuals, produced a symbolic Franco that, at once, represented true conservatism and Christian morals and values in Spain. To Buckley, and others at *NR* previously mentioned, Franco was an "authentic national hero."<sup>79</sup> He was a hero of Spain and a hero for the American conservative movement.

## VI. The Spanish Civil War: Crusade Historiography and Religious Myths

When *National Review* published articles about Franco's Spain, they often included background information and brief discussions of the Spanish Civil War as well. In order to comment on Spain or Franco in any substantive way, demonstrating an understanding of the Spanish Civil War was crucial. When Buckley in particular wrote about the Spanish Civil War, he framed the conflict in a very similar way to how Franco would portray the war in his own regime. Using religious and anti-communist language, the writers at *NR* mapped the prevailing American anti-communist fervor, even outside of the conservative movement, onto Spain and her Civil War. Furthermore, Buckley and *NR* significantly imported the Francoist interpretation of the war into the American conservative movement and resultant political discourse. *NR* repeated religious myths created to justify Franco's crusade historiography and perpetuated the idea that the Spanish Civil War was a crusade to rescue Spain from an internationally directed

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<sup>79</sup> Buckley Jr., "Yes, and Many Thanks – But Now the War is Over," 351.

communist takeover, not a fundamentally Spanish conflict that arose from Spanish causes and a national crisis of politics and identity.

In the simplest sense of the word, a “crusade” can be defined as war against the enemies of God. In order to consider a war a crusade, it is required to not only cement the idea that one side is fighting for God, it is also necessary to classify the enemy as evil and perhaps satanic. Indeed, Paul Preston notes that in Spain, “crusade historiography” framed the war as a conflict between “barbaric godless hordes of the proletariat and the guardians of Christian values.”<sup>80</sup> Buckley would use language parallel to Preston’s description of “crusade historiography” in a 1957 article for *NR* while also offering legendary religious story to paint Franco’s cause as supported by God

First, Buckley tells the story of a crusader myth in the article “Here and There in Spain,” an essay otherwise concerned with US Ambassador John Davis Lodge’s visit to Spain, bullfights, and the unveiling of Franco’s monument to the war. By retelling this story from the Spanish Civil War and comparing it to a similar mythical story from Spain’s Christian struggle against the Moors, Buckley reveals his understanding of the civil war as supported by God, or perhaps in this case St. James, and reinforces the notion that Franco’s primary cause was to rescue Spain from the evils of communism.

In order to fully grasp the significance of this myth, it is important to understand the agency of myth in history. In the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, John Corbin published an essay discussing truth and myth in history using an example from the Spanish Civil War. Not unlike many wars in history, exaggerated stories from combatants and witnesses morphed into myth and legend over time. Corbin investigates one peculiar instance of a potential myth

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<sup>80</sup> Paul Preston, “War of Words: the Spanish Civil War and the Historians,” in *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939* (New York, Routledge, 1993), 2, 12.

perpetuated in a widely known and acclaimed account of the war, Hugh Thomas's *The Spanish Civil War*.<sup>81</sup> The story is of an exceptionally violent execution of upper class civilians in the town of Ronda by the "Reds" wherein 512 men were beaten and thrown off of a cliff to their death. Thomas also includes that the story is similar to a story in Ernst Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.<sup>82</sup> Corbin examines the mythological construction of this tale the post-civil war years and in the corresponding historiography. While the Franco regime worked to instill a "crusade" version of history into the public sphere, professional historians, like Thomas, may have inadvertently and implicitly complied with this directive by including an account of an atrocity that was at least partially a myth. However, Thomas's story does little to contribute to a "crusade historiography." Rather, it unfortunately muddles and distorts the history of local atrocities carried out by the Reds during the war.

Particular conservatives in the United States, on the other hand, were more than willing to comply with the Franco regime's goal to perpetuate the idea of the Spanish Civil War as a crusade. Buckley's retelling of a mythical story from the war does just that. Buckley begins the concluding section of his article "Here and There in Spain with the following, "There is a growing conviction on the part of those who were there, and saw it happen, that St. James the Apostle, patron saint of Spain, has once again intervened in her history."<sup>83</sup> He then describes a popular legend of Spanish history that claims Ramiro the First, a Christian king of a portion of Spain occupied by the Moors, had a dream in which St. James the Apostle offered assistance to any offensive against the Moors. In 844 CE, the Spanish engaged the Arab forces at Clavijo and were nearly routed until a white rider appeared, flaming sword in hand, and turned the tide of the

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<sup>81</sup> John Corbin, "Truth and Myth in History: An Example from the Spanish Civil War," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 25, no. 4 (1995): 610-611.

<sup>82</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War* (London, Penguin Books, 1965), 274.

<sup>83</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., "Here and There in Spain," *National Review*, October 19, 1957, 351.



battle. This story serves as the genesis of St. James (Santiago) becoming patron saint of Spain, and July 25 would become a national holiday and feast day in his honor.

Divine intervention, it would seem, saved the Spanish from defeat at the hands of the Moors. During the Civil War, or more likely in the midst of the Franco Regime, this national myth would be reborn. Buckley continues, writing about a particular offensive by Republican forces that drove into Nationalist territory in an effort to relieve pressure off of Madrid. In prose that one might expect to find in a novel, much less a political opinion magazine, Buckley eloquently describes the valiant defense of a lone machine gun tower by two Nationalists who ultimately succumbed to the Republican onslaught. Then, “Suddenly, in full view of the hundreds of combatants involved, a man dressed in white manned the machine gun, and for six hours, until the reinforcements arrived, held the enemy at bay. Rushing to the tower to relieve him, the commanding general found the dead soldiers, the smoking gun, no ammunition – and no white knight. The date: July 25, 1937.”<sup>84</sup> The framing of this story against the deeper history of Christian Spain carries significant weight. It likens Franco’s cause to defeat communism with the Spanish Reconquista and trades the Muslim Moors (as anti-Christian and anti-Spanish enemies) for the Republican forces propelled by communism.

Note that Buckley does not describe in detail accounts from soldiers who witnessed this event. Rather he simply gestures at a “a growing conviction” amongst those who took part in the battle that a dead saint materialized to fend off the “barbaric godless hordes.” As Preston notes in the opening pages of his essay “War of Words,” the crusade historiography was proclaimed by policemen, priests, government propagandists, and soldiers.<sup>85</sup> So, if soldiers were responsible for producing versions of Civil War history that fell within the confines of a “crusade,” it is entirely

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<sup>84</sup> Buckley, “Here and There in Spain,” 351.

<sup>85</sup> Preston, “War of Words: the Spanish Civil War and the Historians,” in *Revolution and War in Spain*, 2.

reasonable to presume that accounts of this myth from an early battle of the war were offered with an ulterior motive. The Spanish Civil War was painted as a crusade of Nationalist soldiers of God fighting to “wrest Spain from the hands of the visionaries, ideologues, Marxists, and her nihilists”<sup>86</sup> by those within the Franco regime. Buckley, as editor of the *National Review*, took an active role in perpetuating Francoist propaganda within US public political discourse. Whether influenced by his Catholic faith or a desire to imbue moral righteousness on the Nationalist cause during the Spanish Civil War, the inclusion of this narrative in *NR* injected Franco’s crusade historiography into the central source of conservative opinion in the United States.

Second, the idea that the Spanish Civil War was a religious crusade would appear in more direct terms one week after “Here and There in Spain.” In “Yes, and Many Thanks – But Now the War is Over,” Buckley clearly stated his view of the war as a crusade and painted Franco as the heroic crusader who triumphed over atheistic communism. The title and content of the article more broadly appears to argue against the legitimacy of the Franco regime, but Buckley’s writing on Franco and the Spanish situation after their civil war symbolizes Franco to a degree that conforms to the alternative definition of the Spanish dictator provided by the American Catholic right, dating back to the 1930s.

“General Franco is an authentic national hero. It is generally conceded that he above others had the combination of talents, the perseverance, and the sense of righteousness of his cause, that were required to wrest Spain from the hands of the visionaries, ideologues, Marxists, and her nihilists that were imposing upon her, in the thirties, a regime so grotesque as to do violence to the Spanish soul, to deny, even, Spain’s historical identity. He saved the day – but he did not, like Cincinnatus, thereupon return to his plow.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Buckley, “Yes, and Many Thanks – But Now the War is Over,” *National Review*, October 26, 1957, 369.

<sup>87</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., “Yes, and Many Thanks – But Now the War is Over,” in *National Review*, October 26, 1957, 369.

In three drawn out sentences, Buckley paints Franco as a symbolic figure – adopting language better fit for a comic book – while offering a historical interpretation of the Spanish Civil War. Imbuing authenticity to Franco’s status as hero of Spain not only obfuscated the violence and oppression that Franco deployed to achieve victory and solidify his rule, it also highlights the thoroughly American lens through which Buckley views Franco and the war in Spain. For Buckley to call Franco a hero, Buckley would need to ignore entirely, or purposefully fail to mention, the Spanish roots and causes of the Spanish Civil War. Note that this idea largely characterized Catholic support for Franco during the 1930s. For American conservatives as well as Franco, the Spanish Civil War represented a war between the “barbaric godless hordes of the proletariat and the guardians of Christian values.”<sup>88</sup> The key distinction lies within the fact that this depiction of the war explicitly served the motives of the Franco regime to silence opposition and justify his authoritarian rule. While Franco instilled the idea that the war was a crusade against “barbaric, godless hordes,” Buckley defined those hordes as visionaries, ideologues, Marxists, and her nihilists...<sup>89</sup>

The reality that the conservative view of the war aligned with the crusade historiography offered by Franco underscores an important point. This language from Buckley served conservative motives to ideologically oppose liberals in the US. Buckley utilized this version of the history of the Spanish Civil War as a cautionary tale of the dangers of communism and its allies against traditional, Christian nations such as Spain or the United States. Buckley and *NR* demonstrated that they lacked a true knowledge of the Spanish roots of the civil war. At least,

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<sup>88</sup> Paul Preston, “War of Words: the Spanish Civil War and the Historians,” in *Revolution and War in Spain, 1931-1939* (New York, Routledge, 1993), 2, 12.

<sup>89</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., “Yes, and Many Thanks – But Now the War is Over,” in *National Review*, October 26, 1957, 369.

they ignored those causes and shifted the focus. Instead, they took advantage of the Francoist interpretation to telegraph their adherence to anti-communism and demonstrate the importance of anti-communist ideology.

## VII. *National Review* and Guernica

While Buckley and *NR* perpetuated the “crusade historiography” of the Franco regime during the 1950s, other contributors to *NR* took positions that were so controversial they could not be ignored by the larger public and other sources of media. As *NR* made apparent throughout the early years of their existence, the issue of support for or opposition to Spain was a political debate worth having in the United States. Conservatives firmly placed themselves in support of the Franco regime, going so far as to symbolize Franco as a Catholic crusader who fought to save his country from a communist takeover.

The efforts made in *NR* to paint the Spanish Civil War as a crusade would continue into the 1970s. In what was certainly an attempt to delegitimize American liberals and their ideas about history, Dr. Jeffrey Hart, Literature and English professor at Dartmouth, would pen perhaps the most controversial article in the early history of *National Review*. In a diatribe against the evils of communist propaganda, Hart reproduced Francoist propaganda in a popular conservative magazine and created an international stir.

As mentioned previously, Hart was a staunch anti-communist who firmly believed in the superiority of Western civilization. Operating as senior editor to *National Review*, Hart published his essay under the heading “In Re-Revisionism.” The title of the piece was “The Great Guernica Fraud.” Hart contributed the following text in a preface, of sorts, to his article that effectively telegraphs the position he was about to take and his corresponding political bias. It reads,

“1972: U.S Bombs the North Vietnamese Dikes.  
1951: Germ Warfare in Korea. 1937: Nazi Planes Obliterate Guernica.

What have all these stories in common?  
1) They Never happened, and 2) they helped the communists.”<sup>90</sup>

In what would be the last years of Franco’s life and dictatorship, *National Review* published an article which boldly aligned with Francoist propaganda and reassigned blame for one of the Spanish Civil War’s most notorious atrocities away from the true perpetrators. What is more, it claims that the entire event was a fabrication, using evidence from Luis Bolín’s book *Spain: The Vital Years*. Luis Bolin was a Spanish lawyer who organized the flights that would carry General Francisco Franco from the Canary Islands to North Africa. From there, Franco would launch the Nationalist insurgency against the Second Republic. So, the author of the book Hart cites was not just a Spaniard, he was the Spaniard who, arguably, made the war possible and served under Franco until his death in 1969. Should any of his suggested evidence that runs counter to the narrative of the bombing of Guernica be trusted? Hart certainly thinks so.

This sort of propaganda is different from the “crusade historiography” fashioned by Francoists and republished in the *National Review* during the 1950s. This article takes a notorious and indeed infamous event from the Spanish Civil War and challenges the mainstream historiographical conclusions. At this time, the primary historical account of the destruction of Guernica, as Hart himself points out, was outlined in Hugh Thomas’s *The Spanish Civil War*. What is truly revealing about the nature of Hart’s position is its absolutist tone. Hart does not suggest that the narrative of Guernica is flawed, or that new evidence points to new conclusions about the nature of the bombing or how many German and Italian planes participated in the attack. He claims that the entire event as understood by historians and academics never happened. Hart writes, “this account is of Guernica is a total fabrication. The supposed terror-

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<sup>90</sup> Jeffrey Hart, “The Great Guernica Fraud,” in *National Review*, January 5, 1973, 27.

bombing is a non-event that has made real emotional history.”<sup>91</sup> The heading that prefaced the article states outright the idea that “1937: Nazi Planes obliterate Guernica” not only never happened but aided the communist propaganda effort. In his survey of the evidence offered by Bolin, Hart offers incredibly liberal interpretations and, frankly, ahistorical analysis from a biased source. He claimed that the “historical evidence” Bolin provided “have great weight because 1) they were not intended for publication... and 2) the originals can be examined.”<sup>92</sup> He also repeats propagandistic claims from the war that the “reds” burned the town of Guernica in an elaborate scheme to capture international outrage and garner support for the Republican cause.

This article should not be interpreted as an honest, good faith, attempt to offer an alternative historical conclusion about the destruction of Guernica. This essay is a rhetorical exercise and a fairly effective one. It serves to weaponize the history of the Spanish Civil War to fight an ideological war in the United States. It serves to support the claim offered by conservatives that the dangers of communism are widespread and taint many aspects of history.<sup>93</sup> “The Great Guernica Fraud,” with its ahistorical conclusions and combative language, served the conservatives’ goal of this period who attempted to discredit anything they viewed as tainted by communism. Indeed, they argued that communism’s influence was widespread. Unfortunately, it served the purposes of the Franco regime to obfuscate the true history of one of the war’s most notorious atrocities. In his treatise on the Franco regime, historian Stanley Payne notes that the “fabrication” of Guernica as an act of arson from communist forces was the official

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<sup>91</sup> Jeffrey Hart, “The Great Guernica Fraud,” *National Review*, January 5, 1973, 27.

<sup>92</sup> Hart, “The Great Guernica Fraud,” 27.

<sup>93</sup> The publishing statement of *NR*, written by Buckley, acknowledges this conservative view, writing that they wish to “stand athwart history” and operate in a “world dominated by the jubilant single-mindedness of the practicing Communist, with his inside track to History.” William F. Buckley Jr, “Publishing Statement,” in *National Review*, November 19, 1955.

position of the Franco regime for nearly the entire period of 1939-1975.<sup>94</sup> In line with the strict anti-communist ideology of the new conservatives, this article was penned to combat American liberals and argued that the “emotional history” of Guernica helped the communists. According to Hart, and the editors at *NR* who ran this essay, the mainstream account of the destruction of Guernica did more harm than good. Hart’s conclusion that the entire episode of Guernica was fabricated by Communist propaganda and served to obfuscate the American public’s understanding of one of history’s notorious events.

Aside from Hart’s survey of Bolín’s claims and evidence, the image on the front page of the essay is also indicative of the underlying goal of the essay. As *NR* had done with Franco’s crusade historiography in the 1950s, the new conservatives weaponized a contentious historical event to fight ideological battles within the United States. The image that takes center stage of the first page, the donkey that is to represent the democratic party, and presumed liberals in general, is instantly recognizable.

The image is certainly provocative, as the donkey is situated in a similar manner to animals in Picasso’s *Guernica* and bellows a question mark, symbolizing conservatives’ beliefs about American liberals and their interpretation of history. In the first column, Hart also depicts a scene of schoolchildren viewing Picasso’s famous painting and learning the history of the event that inspired Picasso. This indicates that Hart’s concerns also touch education, and the idea that students are being told a false history of Guernica’s destruction, that Hart explains is only helpful to communists.

After a few statements that Guernica was in fact a viable military target and not a defenseless town, Hart points to Nationalist field dispatches that describe the scene of Guernica

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<sup>94</sup> Stanley G. Payne, *The Franco Regime, 1936-1975* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 141.

when the Nationalists entered the town. The dispatch, as quoted by Hart, states “Our men were eager to enter the town. They already knew that the enemy had evacuated Guernica after criminally destroying it and was blaming our planes for its destruction, but Guernica itself is free of bomb craters.” Hart next cites another dispatch that supports the first, which includes the language that Guernica was “deliberately burnt and destroyed by the Reds...”<sup>95</sup> A few quick points, the first dispatch’s note that the Basque’s were “blaming our planes for its destruction” does not prove much except to suggest that the author of the field dispatch was unaware that it was German and Italian planes who carried out the raid and would likely have no knowledge of the order to carry out the raid. Next, in blindly accepting the words of the dispatch at face value, Hart is not demonstrating an ability to read against the grain and examine historical evidence critically.

Another point Hart raised is the character of the damage to the town and the required amount of munitions necessary to destroy the town. He writes that “thousands of bombs would be required” to completely destroy Guernica. He supports this idea with the notion that the two opposing forces in the Civil War could not afford that quantity of arms. This claim is easily refuted on two accounts. First, Hart provides no evidence of his expertise on the nature of aerial bombardment and the technological capabilities of aerial bombs during the 1930s. Anybody can claim that more bombs would have been necessary to destroy a town, only historians make these claims supported with historical evidence. Second, the claim that neither side could afford those level of munitions does not take into account the contributions, both financially and militarily, of Germany and Italy. Note that other to refute the claim that German planes carried out the bombardment, Hart does not mention Germany once in this article. What he does mention, quite

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<sup>95</sup> Hart, “The Great Guernica Fraud,” 28.



frequently, are the communists and their penchant for producing and distributing propaganda.

Hart's article quickly gained international notoriety. In August 1973, *NR* published a series of letters and essays responding to Hart's article from a variety of historians and other individuals. *NR* also included a comment from Hart, responding to the controversy. Before the responses, *NR* included a statement of their own:

“In our January 5, 1973 issue, we published “The Great Guernica Fraud,” by Professor Jeffrey Hart. He argued that, contrary to the received view, the destruction of the town of Guernica was carried out by the retreating pro-government forces, and not by the German Condor Legion. It is not too much to say that this article caused an international stir. It was reprinted in the *Washington Post*, in *Die Welt*, and in assorted Spanish and other Continental organs. The East European press reacted. *NR* received numerous letters and articles on the subject, and some of these possess substantial political and scholarly interest in their own right. Some contribute original research and fresh documentation to the Guernica discussion. Herewith we present three such pieces and reprint an important letter by historian Brian Crozier, which appeared in England. Professor Hart concludes with a brief evaluative comment.”<sup>96</sup>

The above statement is remarkably measured in its tone, in stark contrast to the bombastic piece written by Hart. The four essays and letters reprinted in *NR* are arranged in two by two fashion, with two pieces opposing Hart's claims followed by two pieces that support Hart's argument that the Germans did not bomb Guernica in an experiment in terror bombing. The responses that argue against the Dartmouth professor's view cite primary sources from German and Spanish documents. The two pieces that support Hart's position cite the same documents and sources as Hart originating from Luis Bolín's book.

Without delving into a lengthy and serious analysis of the claims offered by all of the responses printed by *NR*, it is still possible to draw several important conclusions about the publication of Hart's article and the responses more than six months later. First, Hart published an article in a widely read and influential conservative opinion magazine that perpetuated

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<sup>96</sup> “Getting at the Guernica Myth,” in *National Review*, August 31, 1976, 936.

Francoist myths regarding the bombing of Guernica. Next, it is clear that, though *NR* acted with integrity in printing responses from a variety of opinions, they included responses that rehashed and even argued further the idea that the destruction of Guernica was carried out by the communists and not German aircraft. The fact that these pieces cited the exact same evidence that Hart used does not lend any further credibility to this position. Rather, it reveals the level to which conservative opinion on the bombing of Guernica was not necessarily homogenous. The responses printed in *NR* illustrate the degree to which conservatives varied in their adherence to the creed of anti-communism. Finally, the title of the collection of responses is revealing. “Getting at the Guernica Myth” does not paint *NR* as a proponent of scholarly debate or as a seeker of historical truths. Guernica, its destruction and its mark on European and World History in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War, is not a myth, though it has taken on certain mythological qualities over time.<sup>97</sup> Ultimately, the historical debate regarding the destruction of Guernica would enter the public conversation here, but true steps forward in terms of academic scholarship on the topic were several years away.

The publication of an article reinserting Francoist propaganda into an international discussion on Guernica demonstrates the extent to which Franco and his crusade historiography acted within the conservative imagination. The way in which *NR* handled the responses and addressed the international stir elucidates this connection even further. The decades long effort to portray Franco as a hero of the West and of Christianity in *NR*, in an attempt to distinguish their own political ideology, resulted in the act of knowingly publishing conspiracy theory as accepted conservative opinion.

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<sup>97</sup> Herbert R. Southworth, *Guernica! Guernica!: A Study of Journalism, Diplomacy, Propaganda, and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

## VIII. Conclusion

With the election of Ronald Reagan as President of the United States in 1980, Buckley's conservative movement which began in the 1950s had reached the highest level of political office. Many prominent individuals in American politics who appeared over the course of the conservative movement stretching into the 1980s and 1990s can trace their ideological foundations to Buckley Jr. and *National Review*. Barry Goldwater, the first of the new conservatives to run for President in 1964, published his widely read book *The Conscience of a Conservative* in June 1960. The book was largely ghostwritten by *NR* associate L. Brent Bozell, Buckley Jr.'s brother in law. Ronald Reagan was one of the magazine's earliest subscribers. Karl Rove was a teenager when he discovered *NR*. Rush Limbaugh stated that he "grew up on *National Review* and Mr. Buckley." Future Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito attributed his political views to the influence of Buckley Jr. and *NR* in a job application to the Department of Justice.<sup>98</sup> These iconic conservatives of the recent past, and indeed present day, grew out of the conservative movement fashioned by Buckley and *National Review*.

*NR* would continue to produce articles on Spain and Franco's legacy in the 1980s and into the 1990s. These various pieces would continue to assert the arguments that were outlined in the previous decades, declaring Franco deserved the credit for Spain's resurgence in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>99</sup> that he was not truly a totalitarian dictator,<sup>100</sup> and that he acted first and foremost with pro-Spain and pro-Catholic intentions.<sup>101</sup> Always a pro-Franco magazine, *NR* would steer away from the sort of crusade historiography that it perpetuated regularly throughout the period from 1955-1975. The fundamental conclusion remains that during the conservative movement, the

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<sup>98</sup> Bogus, *Buckley*, 4-6.

<sup>99</sup> William F. Buckley Jr., "The Reign in Spain – On the Right," in *National Review*, May 15, 1981, 576.

<sup>100</sup> "Spain: Fifty Years Ago," in *National Review*, September 12, 1986, 21.

<sup>101</sup> Chilton Williamson Jr., "The Right Books," in *National Review*, August 5, 1988, 53.

strong influence of *NR* can hardly be called into question. With this strong influence on the trajectory of conservative ideology, *NR* repeatedly published pro-Franco articles that at times bordered on simple contrarianism and other times unashamedly perpetuated propaganda.

Buckley Jr.'s ideology on conservatism, politics in the United States, religion, and Spanish history and identity shaped *NR* from its foundation in 1955 throughout the transformation of the conservative movement. His support for Franco would distinguish him from many of his fellow conservatives, but an influential and solid base of *NR* conservatives aligned with Buckley and his position on Franco and Spain. Buckley was responsible for bringing pro-Franco sentiments into the mainstream of conservative political ideology. His thinking and writing on Franco, the regime in Spain, and the Spanish Civil War, within the pages of *NR* offered an alternative to the understanding of Spain held by the wider American public. Unfortunately, this alternative was based primarily in crusade historiography, religious mythmaking, and propaganda that was created by the regime. In a sense, much of Buckley's thinking on this issue was unoriginal. His views on anti-communism and Franco can be traced back to his father and the Franco regime. This essay asserts that an influential actor within the conservative movement portrayed the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco in symbolic language. This symbolic Franco was presented as the "true" Franco, but this symbolic Franco was less a realistic display and more an idealized portrait that was based in crusade historiography and propaganda. Any study of the conservative movement in American history that does not come into contact with this fact is not a holistic attempt to uncover the roots of conservative ideology on authoritarianism and fascism. It is the goal of this paper to fill this gap in the historiography.

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